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Physician Views About Cancer Clinical Trial Research

[This study examines factors that impact on how and whether physicians discuss cancer clinical trial research opportunities with their patients who are ethnic minorities or members of the medically underserved.]

Clinical trials are research experiments that are designed to either create new forms of cancer treatment or to improve current cancer treatment and prevention options. Yet, very few people participate in cancer clinical trial research. Overall, between 3 and 20% of patients who are eligible for experimental treatment actually participate in clinical trials. This is a major problem that is widely recognized in the research community. Not only are the overall numbers of participants in clinical trial research low; in addition, representation of people who come from a variety of ethnic, racial, and immigrant groups is also low.

One goal of cancer clinical trial research is to test how effective a given drug or treatment therapy is with a wide variety of people. Such tests allow physicians to troubleshoot the effectiveness of a given course of therapy before it is distributed widely to the general public. Patient diversity in trial experiments is essential to understanding how a given therapy will work within various patient groups.

There are multiple barriers – cultural, structural, and psychological – that make it difficult to create diverse patient experiment groups. Some of these barriers have to do with what patients think about clinical trials. Other barriers have to do with what their doctors think about clinical trials. Research suggests that patients will consider experimental therapy only when their own doctors actively suggest it to them. Yet, the factors that affect whether doctors will choose to discuss experimental therapies with their patients are largely unknown.

The current study seeks to explore factors that impact the role (e.g., helping or hindering) that physicians play in the clinical trial recruitment process. It will examine physician attitudes toward and knowledge about cancer clinical trial research. In addition, it will ask physicians about their own referral patterns for cancer clinical trials. Specifically, this study aims to achieve three goals:

- To assess current physician barriers to successful patient recruitment into clinical trials using survey research.
- To provide an education program for physicians that will address common provider attitudes and beliefs that currently hinder doctors from discussing clinical trials with their patients.
- To measure changes in physician beliefs and attitudes as a result of the education program that may be related to how doctors address and discuss clinical trials with their patients who are ethnic minorities or members of the medically underserved.

